

## English Pronunciation 3

1. Introduction:
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3. English and Italian vowels compared (2)
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5. English and Italian consonants compared (1)
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### What else makes English vowels different from Italian vowels?

- While all Italian vowels tend to have the same duration, in English vowels differ in their duration
  - Ex.:
    - beat bit
    - bag beg
    - food foot
- English speakers can hear and produce differences between long and short vowels, while Italians cannot

## Vowel Duration in English

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English Vowels Have  
Different Typical Durations

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/i/ > /ɪ/  
/u/ > /ʊ/  
/æ/ > /ɛ/  
/ɑ/ > /ʌ/  
/ɔ/ > /ɑ/

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Any vowel can be spoken at any duration, but some vowels are typically longer than others. This is called the vowel *inherent duration* or *typical duration*.

## In Italian...

- What is important is the **duration of the consonant** and not of the vowel
- Words are distinguished on the basis of the duration of the consonant:
  - Ex.: meta vs. metta  
pala vs palla  
fato vs. fatto
- Italian speakers can hear and produce differences between long and short consonants, while English speakers cannot

## About English Vowel Duration

- Vowel duration is indicated in phonetic transcriptions with a colon:

*/'bɪd/ vs /'bɪd:/* ("bid" vs. "bead")

In English, vowel duration is also influenced by the context

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## Factors affecting English vowel duration

- Some factors affecting vowel duration in English are:
  - Position before a voiced vs voiceless consonant ←
  - Stress
  - Emphasis

## Voicing of following consonant


- Vowels are longer before voiced than before voiceless consonants:
  - Ex.: beat    bead
  - cap    cab
  - peck    peg

## Factors affecting English vowel duration

- Some factors affecting vowel duration in English are:
  - Position before a voiced vs voiceless consonant
  - **Stress** 
  - Emphasis

## English Stress

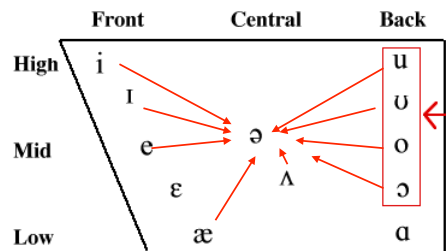
- All words have stress
- From a physiological point of view, stress is connected to the speaker's respiratory activity (coordination between breathing and speaking)
- In English there is an important difference between stressed and unstressed syllables

 stressed syllables are **emphasized**,  
unstressed syllables are reduced

## Phonetically

- Stress affects both English vowel duration and quality
  - All unstressed vowels tend to be reduced to a central vowel, of undistinguished quality [ə]
  - Extremely reduced vowels may disappear completely

## English Unstressed Vowels



## The Schwa sound

- Schwa is called the *neutral vowel*:
  - produced in a central (called *neutral*) position
  - symbol: /ə/
  - occurs only in unstressed position
  - brief and unstressed

## Some examples:

|           |            |
|-----------|------------|
| VITamin   | MASTer     |
| supPORT   | DICtionary |
| ocCUR     | PREsident  |
| conDItion | opPOSE     |
| baNAna    | SYStem     |
| comPUter  | BASic      |
| conTROL   | ENglish    |

## How is Stress used in English?

- It can be used to distinguish syntactic categories, for example:
  - INSult (noun) vs. inSULT (verb)
  - INSert “ vs inSERT “

See table in next slide

You can hear some examples of how stress is used in English to create grammatical categories at:

<http://hctv.humnet.ucla.edu/departments/linguistics/VowelsandConsonants/course/chapter5/grammatical%20influences.htm>

## Stress in verbs and nouns

- Words may have one stress pattern if nouns and another if verbs e.g.

| Noun    | Verb    |
|---------|---------|
| DEsert  | deSERT  |
| IMport  | imPORT  |
| EScort  | eSCORT  |
| REcord  | reCORD  |
| PROtest | proTEST |

## Compounds

Compounds usually have **main stress on the first, qualifying item**, e.g.

- *English* teacher vs English *teacher*
- Net work
- INTERnet FRAMEwork
- SMART card
- CAR park
- SWImming pool
- AIRbag
- NIGHTclub

Italian speakers usually place the stress on the second element, e.g. airBAG, interNET, etc.



## English word stress alternation

- pòlicy: [pɒləci]
- pòlice: [pəˈlɪs]
- + man [mæn]  
[pəˈlɪsmən] [pˈlɪsmən]
- pòlitics: [pɒlətɪks]
- pòlitical: [pəˈlɪtɪkəl]

## Orthography...

- Things are further complicated with orthography... which does not reflect vowel reduction...
  - Ex.: chocolate [ˈtʃɒklət]

## Function and lexical words

- The English lexicon distinguishes between *lexical* (or *content*) words and *function* words (or *relational* words)
    - Lexical words: nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs
    - Function words: conjunctions, articles, pronouns, prepositions, auxiliaries, etc
- Ex.: a<sub>(f)</sub> cup<sub>(l)</sub> of<sub>(f)</sub> tea<sub>(l)</sub>

## Vowel reduction in function words

- Function words are more likely to be reduced in English.
  - Vowels in function words may disappear completely
  - This is at the basis of the so-called ‘contracted forms’ in English
    - I’ ve, He’ s, etc.....

## Some examples

|        |        |                       |
|--------|--------|-----------------------|
| a:     | [ei]   | [ə]                   |
| and:   | [ænd]  | [ənd], [ən], [ŋ]      |
| as:    | [æz]   | [əz]                  |
| at:    | [æt]   | [ət]                  |
| can:   | [kæn]  | [kən], [kŋ]           |
| has:   | [hæz]  | [həz], [əz], [z], [s] |
| he:    | [hi]   | [hɪ], [ɪ]             |
| must:  | [mvst] | [məst], [məs], [ms]   |
| to:    | [tu]   | [tu], [tə], [ə]       |
| would: | [wud]  | [wəd], [əd], [d]      |

## You try...

|                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| i must GO      | it musthave BEEN |
| I havto go     | a GLASSof WATER  |
| aCUP of COFFEE | LOOKat me        |
| JOE and JILL   | TALKto me        |
| i wantto go    | i can SAY        |

## PLEASE NOTE....

- Personal pronouns and prepositions are not stressed in English so they are generally reduced

COME withme

I' ll CALLyou

He ASKEDme

an inviTAtion foryou

She SAWhim

a BOOK forthem

## Why does it happen?

- Stress placement in a language is connected to that language rhythmic patterns
- English has very different rhythmic patterns from Italian
  - Italian: 'syllable-timed'
  - English: 'stress-timed' language

## Another 'Vowel Trouble' for Italian learners of English

- Vowel reduction (and deletion in different words and phrasal contexts)
  - Due to differences in stress and rhythmic patterns between Italian and English

## Syllable-timing in Italian

- 'Syllable-timing' conveys the idea that all syllables in an utterance tend to have constant duration
  - Stress does not have an effect on syllable duration
    - Unstressed syllables are not reduced in quality and/or duration
    - Ex.: inconfondibilmente

## Syllable-timing in Italian (2)

- Schematically, an utterance can be represented as a sequence of consonants and vowels like the following:

CVCV' CV CVCV' CVCV

## Stress-timing in English

- 'Stress-timing' conveys the idea that in an utterance the interval between stresses is kept constant.
  - Utterance stress assignment strongly de-emphasizes unstressed syllables.
  - The syllables that are in-between stress intervals tend to be compressed.
  - The compression of unstressed syllables may lead to the disappearance of unstressed vowels

## Stress-timing in English (2)

- Schematically, an utterance can be represented as a sequence of consonants and vowels like the following:

CvCV' Cv CvCvCvCV' C  
→ CCV' Cv CCvCCV' C

## Stress-timing in English (3)

- This tendency accounts for many inconsistencies of English spelling whereby not all syllables spelled in a word are actually pronounced:
- Ex.: chocolate [tʃɒklət]

## Practice

- Which of these words contains a schwa, and where is it? (you may guess or check their pronunciation in an online dictionary)
- *Amazing*
- *altogether*
- *another*
- *habit*
- *vegetable*
- *feeder*
- *fascination*
- *buzz*
- *management*
- *basket*
- *pasted*
- *candies*
- *basic*
- *rabbit*
- *faucet*
- *attack*
- *perfect*
- *address*

*bunker*  
*laboratory*  
*elephant*  
*development*  
*sponsor*  
*plus*  
*blanket*  
*synonym*  
*liquify*  
*lamine*  
*support*  
*sport*

*practice*  
*busted*  
*nationality*  
*mustache*  
*butter*  
*gallop*  
*instinct*